St Harrison D-4 (1922-1924) 1924 MI Middle East
Bedouin M34

to his masters in making possible a feast and a taste of meat for a large number. From camel's milk is made a sort of cottage cheese which is kneaded into little cakes much the shape and size of children's mud pies. These are plentifully mixed with hair in the process of manufacture and are baked in the sun almost to the consistency of bricks. They will keep indefinitely and form a savory addition to the diet in time of scarcity.

Occasionally the Bedouin will capture a *dhobb*, or armored lizard, and rejoice exceedingly at the kindness of Providence. Or he may succeed in catching a desert rat, or *jerboa*. In either case there will be meat to eat that night. On rarer occasions he may succeed in shooting a gazelle, and then there will be a real feast in his tent. But even at the best there is probably no community in the world that lives constantly so close to the starvation line as the Bedouin.

As a host, however, the Bedouin has no peer. The unaffected joy that is shown at the opportunity of entertaining a guest may well serve as a model for those of us who come from the more practical and unfriendly West. To sit in a Bedouin's tent and enjoy his hospitality is a pleasure to be remembered, even if the small amount of meat served with the rice be so tough that biting a piece in two is impossible, to say nothing of chewing it properly.

The very poor may sometimes flee from the demands of hospitality, but once asked they may not deny entertainment to any one. In the desert the desperately poor Bedouins avoid settling in the region of a recognized caravan track. To be compelled to entertain many guests would almost mean starvation for them, but they never refuse if a guest appears. The only alternative is to re-

l: Raswan T-3 (1913-35) 1947 MD4 Rwala
Bedouins M 54

cleverly guided with his thighs and hands, and by his voice making her walk or gallop.

An hour before sunrise we rode into the steppe, waking to a glorious morning. I was mounted on a spirited mare, very fast and of great endurance. Over three hundred armed beaters from the widely scattered tents of the Tai' Bedouins had ridden out the previous day to the foothills of the Jabal Sinjar, there to cut off the retreat of the wolves into the northern mountains. Bands of gazelles and many bustards and other fowl fled before us. But we left them untouched, as we were after other game. [136]

Only when the left wing of our riders roused two wolves did we give chase.

Wolves do not break cover and "go away" as foxes do, but there were other things to which one had to give attention in this hunt. Moles and burrowing mice had undermined the ground and more than half of our horses "took a toss" as they stepped into the hidden holes.

We galloped about twelve miles, and four or five wolves had been put up by the beaters. Our horsemen followed them tirelessly. I came so close to one animal that I could almost have touched his fur with my outstretched lance. My horse followed the runaway with the ardour of a bloodhound. I had therefore to give my undivided attention to the dangerous ground and repeatedly turned the mare aside, sometimes in the very nick of time, to prevent her floundering into one of the sandy burrows.

The slender lance rested perfectly balanced in my hand. My wolf slackened speed somewhat and my mare

1: Raswan T-3 (1913-35) 1947 MD4 Rwala
Bedouins MJ4

Sheykh Tai' threw several handfuls of sand over the spilled blood—for so desert custom demands. Blood is *haram*, that is, "forbidden." Opening the jaws of the dead animal and pointing to the wicked fangs, he said: "Thou and I are kinsmen for the traces which thou leavest behind are the same as mine." (We are both robbers, he meant—like all despised Bedouins.)

Later in the day, as we galloped on, we sighted in the distance what at first we took for some of our mounted hunters driving wolves towards us. But they did not move.

I thought I could recognize riderless horses, watching us with raised heads. But Sheyk Tai' laughed and cried out to me that they were neither horses nor horsemen, but wild asses. I would not believe him at first, for the animals seemed too high in the leg.

Sheykh Tai' pointed out to me that the troop had a leader and this became apparent when the shy creatures ran off. We did not follow, and they disappeared into the clear distance of the Sinjar Mountains.

Fleeting shadows cast from above now hurried across the plain before our horses. I knew them of old from raids in the inner part of Arabia. They were the "Sharers of the Prey."

Shading my eyes with my hand, I looked up to the sky, where on motionless pinions the great vultures were sailing. They knew well the purpose of our ride; and they were sure of their feast of dead wolves. A widespread cloud of dust rose on the horizon and moved towards us. These were the beaters, whose semicircle stead-

1 - [of a wolf killed in a hunt--Analyst]

k Dickson G-5 (1929-47) 1951 MI 1 Kuwait MI
Bedouins M34

Accompaniments of Rain

Chap. XX

THE RAINS

The rains may arrive any time between the 1st October and 3rd November, and usually set in with a series of thunderstorms. Great and wild is the rejoicing when Kuwait first perceives, borne strongly on the breeze, the smell of the first rain on parched-up sand. I have described in Chapter III the scene of excitement when men, women and children rush out into the rain and collect the precious water into every possible utensil. Camels groan extra loud to testify their pleasure, and sheep set up a pandemonium of baa-ing. The city folk, normally dependent for their water on the Shatt al 'Arab, 100 miles away, act like their Badawin brethren, and endeavour to catch into every form of utensil the water running off their house-tops.

An annual visitor now makes its appearance in the desert. This is the *bint al muttar* (Daughter of Rain), a small plump-bodied spider, brilliantly scarlet in colour and with a body like velvet. It appears apparently from nowhere as soon as the first rain has wet the ground.

The next arrivals in Kuwait are old Badawin men bearing sprigs of green grass which they have brought to show their beloved Shaikh, with congratulations such as, *"ya tawil al 'umr* (O thou with long life) God has given good rain at So-and-So, there has been *sail* (the expression used to convey that water-channels have flowed), and so many hand-widths of rain have fallen (meaning the depth into the soil which the rain has penetrated), we come to show you the green grass (*'ashab*) that has come up". As bringers of good news they get, of course, suitable presents.

This is followed by other news brought in from various parts that *khabras* (lakelets) have formed at So-and-So, and will last for so many days.

Last of all comes news that the *hubara* or lesser bustard have made their appearance. From the shaikh downwards, out go all lovers of the chase, and hundreds of birds are brought into the town and to the various Badawin encampments as food. They are assuredly an additional gift of God.

If rain falls in October, truffles and mushrooms, great delicacies to every Badawin, appear in the following spring, and form the staple food of the tent-dweller and his family for weeks on end. Truffles

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CHAPTER XXVIII

Hawking

223 From the very earliest times hawking or falconry has been looked upon among Arabs as the sport of kings. It was probably introduced into Europe direct from Arabia, after the early Crusades, and certainly came into Spain with the Arab invaders. There is little doubt, I think, that the sport spread with Islam to Persia and even to far-off China, though the reverse process has been suggested by persons who have studied the subject.

Hawking is mentioned by the earliest Arab chroniclers, and many stories are told of how the ancient ruling house of Al Arair, the hereditary shaikhs of the Bani Khalid in Hasa and Najd, encouraged the sport and preserved game for hawking's sake.

Northern and North-Eastern Arabia are to-day the home of the sport in the peninsula, for it is in this area that the first annual migra-
224 tion of the lesser bustard, or *houbara*, takes place. The *houbara* is the principal game hunted with hawks, though hare and even gazelle also give fair sport.

• 134 The *houbara* appears on the eastern and north-eastern seaboard of the Persian Gulf about October in each year, and birds continue to come till about April, when they gradually disappear again to cooler climes.

The local Arab says they come from the highlands of Persia, but more probably they come in the first place from Central Asia, and migrate south through Persia, to avoid the intense cold. Certainly Persia, Iraq, North-West India, Baluchistan and Eastern Arabia all see the migrating bustard.

A very few remain behind in Arabia each year and breed locally, but these are rare. I have myself seen a couple of *houbara* eggs (15th March, 1935) which were found 40 miles south of Kuwait.

223 From Zubair down to the Trucial Coast of Oman, the *houbara* season is looked forward to with the greatest keenness. Princes, Amirs, great shaikhs, petty shaikhs, and every tribesman who can scrape

A Dickson G-5 (1919-67) 1951 MI I Kuwait
Bedouins 1424

CHAPTER XXXIV

Locusts

Truly blessed are those countries and states which know not the 731
Locust, nor have experienced his visitations.

When the word locust crops up, the average person thinks of the plagues of Egypt, and recalls vivid descriptions in the Old Testament. He pictures a mighty swarm of flying grasshoppers which settle on fruit trees, hedgerows, vegetable gardens and wheat fields, and after taking their fill, pass on. This is not an entirely false picture, but the reality is far worse. In a country like Arabia visitations are comparatively common, and one locust year is invariably followed by a second, third, and possibly a fourth. Locusts destroy not only all living bushes and available green grass, each blade of which is vital to life in a desert country like the Arabian peninsula, but cause untold hardship to townsmen and villagers. Sheep die in hundreds after a visitation because there is no more green or dry grass left for them to feed on. Though I speak with particular feeling for the Arabia I love, the locust problem is not confined to that country. Locusts annually devastate large tracts and districts of North Africa, Central and South Africa, Baluchistan, India, Persia, Iraq and Turkey.

The insect's home seems, however, to be Africa, and as far as 136
Arabia is concerned, the general route followed by these pests in 825
migration would seem to be from Abyssinia to Yemen in the first place. Thence the swarms apparently select one of two routes—one swarm going to Baluchistan and India via the South Arabian seaboard, and the other moving up into the Hijaz, Najd, North-Eastern tracts of Arabia, and on into Iraq and Persia. There are naturally many subsidiary migrations, but in the main as far as Arabia proper is concerned, I think—though I speak with diffidence—the theory of swarms coming over from Abyssinia and then dividing into two main streams, is fairly near the truth. This is the theory generally accepted among desert Arabs.